

# Silences in the boom: coal seam gas, neoliberalizing discourse, and the future of regional Australia

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## Abstract

In high-stakes resource use struggles currently playing out across the world, different beliefs about economics and "growth-first" regional development underpin decisions and dynamics that have far-reaching consequences. Neoliberalizing political economies rely on the maintenance of particular beliefs associated with these themes, and work to delegitimize and silence alternatives. Thus understanding the beliefs of actors concerning these themes, especially with respect to neoliberal ideas, is key to understanding these socio-political struggles. This article uses a combination of literature review, critical discourse analysis and selected fieldwork data to explore the recent debate about coal seam gas (CSG) in Eastern Australia. In particular, it examines the ideas that underlie texts produced by CSG production companies, the Queensland Government, and Lock the Gate (a key group opposed to rapid CSG industry expansion). The analysis indicates that with respect to the above themes, Lock the Gate expresses their opposition to CSG through perspectives that mostly depart from those with a key role in maintaining neoliberalizing political economies. In contrast, the Queensland government and CSG companies, despite each encompassing significant internal diversity, have expressed relatively similar and consistent positions, aligned with neoliberalizing ideas. The article problematizes descriptions of the state government as a neutral arbitrator that can restore balance between the beliefs of gas companies and groups like Lock the Gate, and advances consideration of deeper differences.

**Key Words:** coal seam gas, neoliberalizing discourse, regional development, role of government, Queensland

## Résumé

En luttes «high-stakes» sur l'utilisation des ressources, des croyances différentes sur l'économie et le développement régional sous-tendent les décisions et les dynamiques qui ont de lourdes conséquences. L'économie politique néolibérale repose sur le maintien de croyances particulières, et il travailler à délégitimer et silencer des alternatives. Ainsi la compréhension des croyances des acteurs sur ces thèmes, en particulier en ce qui concerne les idées néolibérales, est la clé de la compréhension de ces luttes socio-politiques. Cet article utilise une combinaison de revue de la littérature, l'analyse critique du discours et des données de terrain sélectionnés à explorer le débat récent sur le gaz de couche de charbon (CSG) dans l'Est de l'Australie. En particulier, il examine les idées qui sous-tendent les textes produits par des sociétés de production CSG, le gouvernement du Queensland, et «Verrouiller la porte» (Lock the Gate) (un groupe clé dans opposition à l'expansion de CSG). L'analyse indique que par rapport aux thèmes ci-dessus, «Verrouiller la porte» exprime leur opposition à la CSG par les perspectives qui partent la plupart de ceux qui soutiennent néolibéral économies politiques. En revanche, le gouvernement du Queensland et les entreprises du CSG, malgré un diversité interne importante, ont exprimé des positions relativement similaires et cohérents, harmonisés avec les idées néolibéral. L'article problématise l'idée que le gouvernement de Queensland est un

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arbitre neutre qui peut rétablir l'équilibre entre les croyances des compagnies de gaz et de groupes comme «Verrouiller la Porte», et il identifie les différences profondes.

**Mots-clés:** gaz de couche de charbon, le discours néolibéral, le développement régional, le rôle du gouvernement, Queensland

## Resumen

En conflictos sobre el uso de recursos de alto riesgo, los cuales se está produciendo hoy en día en todo el mundo, diferentes creencias en relación a economía y sobre el "crecer primero" en el desarrollo regional sustentan las decisiones y las dinámicas las cuales tienen consecuencias de largo alcance. Economías políticas neoliberales se basan en el mantenimiento de creencias particulares asociadas con estos temas, al igual que su forma para deslegitimar y silenciar alternativas. De esta manera, el comprender las creencias de los actores relacionadas con estos temas, especialmente en relación a ideas neoliberales, es clave para el entendimiento de estos conflictos socio-políticos. Este trabajo utiliza una combinación de revisión literaria, análisis del discurso crítico, e información seleccionada en trabajo de campo para así explorar el debate presente sobre el gas de veta de carbón en el Este de Australia. Este estudio examina en particular las ideas que se esconden bajo los textos producidos por las productoras de gas de carbón, el Gobierno de Queensland, y *Lock the Gate* (un grupo de oposición clave contra la expansión rápida de la industria del gas de carbón). El análisis indica que en relación a los temas anteriores, *Lock the Gate* expresa su oposición en contra del gas de veta de carbón a través de perspectivas que parten sobre todo de aquellos que tienen un rol determinante en el mantenimiento de políticas económicas neoliberales. En contraste, el Gobierno de Queensland y las compañías de gas de carbón, a pesar de que cada una engloba una diversidad interna significativa, han expresado posiciones relativamente similares y consistentes alineadas con ideas neoliberales. El estudio problematiza los desafíos del gobierno estatal como un árbitro neutral el cual puede restablecer el balance entre las creencias de las compañías de gas y grupos opositores como *Lock the Gate* y propone la consideración de diferencias más profundas.

**Palabras claves:** Gas de veta de carbón, discursos neoliberales, desarrollo regional, rol de Gobierno, Queensland

## 1. Introduction

In May 2012 an estimated 7,000 Australians participated in a single march against coal seam gas (CSG) extraction in the town of Lismore, located in north eastern New South Wales (Turnbull 2012, see Figure 1). Many of the Lismore marchers held signs from the Lock the Gate Alliance (Lock the Gate), a key umbrella group opposed to CSG industry expansion across eastern Australia encouraging and supporting 'grassroots' resistance among landholders. A steady stream of such marches, petitions, conventions, blockades, and direct physical obstruction of CSG industry operation over the last two years has seen unexpected alliances form between, and among, landholders and various civil society groups. This has led some commentators to speculate about the 'radicalization' of rural eastern Australia – an area rich in coal and CSG deposits where public opinion and furor is particularly strong (see Bahnisch 2012). Such unprecedented domestic public engagement with trends in fossil fuel energy production and associated land use issues is important. It points to a high stakes contest, interconnected with similar others playing out across the world, as longstanding debates about pollution (e.g. Coram *et al.* 2014; Huffman 2000; Willow 2014), worker's rights (e.g. Andrews 2008), and rights to land (e.g. Howlett, Seini, McCallum and Osborne 2011: 317-318) combined with increasing concern about climate change and global scarcities of resources (e.g. Gleick and Paniappan 2010).<sup>2</sup> What happens in the next ten years with Australia's planned new fossil fuel exports, particularly Queensland coal, is set to have a substantial impact on the global climate change situation

<sup>2</sup> In Australia, where there has been a push for 20 years to minimize unnecessary groundwater extraction from the Great Artesian Basin (Australian Government 2013; Turrall and Fullagar 2007:331), and where salinity is already a relatively high profile environmental concern (CSIRO Land and Water 2008: 2), the impact on water supplies of the mass dewatering of coal seams and the subsequent disposal of saline water are among the strong concerns people have about unconventional gas extraction (Palaszczuk 2010: 2144-2145).

(Greenpeace 2013; Greenpeace Asia Pacific 2012; Steffen and Hughes 2013). In this context alone, it is important to examine the key beliefs at play in domestic debates about Australia's fossil fuels. These beliefs have important consequences for Australia's resulting actions regarding exports, which in turn have the capacity to impact investments in and acceptance of different forms of energy production globally (Beyond Zero Emissions 2012; Flannery, Beale and Hueston 2012; Pearse 2012).



Figure 1. The Surat and Bowen Basins in Queensland. Source: de Rijke 2013.

This article addresses current contests over Australian coal seam gas through an examination of discursive factors that dominate public debate. In particular, the article explores perspectives and language use concerning two themes: what is considered effective regional development, and what is implied about the role of economics in decision making. Noting the particular relevance of these two themes to resource use struggles, and their interconnectedness with neoliberalizing political economy, we explore the ways perspectives and language concerning these themes might be working to emphasize some kinds of

discussions about coal seam gas while obscuring or circumventing others. We do this through an analysis of texts from stakeholders in the state of Queensland throughout 2012, supplemented with more recent observations from the field across Australia's East Coast.

We start with a brief overview of coal seam gas developments in Australia, then, to clarify our approach, explain what we mean by critical discourse analysis, neoliberalizing political economy, and the normalization of particular perspectives and 'foreclosure' of others. We outline the kinds of perspectives and language we expect would comprise a 'neoliberalizing' take on the two themes with which we are concerned: a definition of apolitical orthodox economics, and of 'growth-first' visions of regional development. We apply these concepts to a selection of texts produced by three broad stakeholder groups: coal seam gas proponents, the Queensland Government and the anti-coal seam gas organization Lock the Gate. We add further data from selected interviews<sup>3</sup> with actors involved in the CSG debate to help contextualize the contestations surrounding CSG in eastern Australia.

We conclude that the Queensland Government's discourse in the debate about CSG is in fact characterized by the normalization of certain perspectives, while others are delegitimized and/or silenced. The perspectives that we show are normalized in the CSG debate in Eastern Australia are mostly 'neoliberalizing' perspectives articulated with language that works to undermine potential support for a vision of regional development that is endogenous or 'bottom-up.' It also works to undermine approaches to regional development that are able to imagine increased prosperity, health and well-being without intense capitalist growth.

## 2. The context

### *Coal seam gas in Australia*

Coal seam gas, like shale gas, is an 'unconventional' gas, the extraction of which is subject to substantial public controversy in Australia. It is sourced from methane deposits that, when compared to conventional deposits in the absence of special stimulation or extraction techniques, retain a much greater proportion of their otherwise available gas. Production of sufficient quantities of CSG for international trade thus may require the relatively new technique of hydraulic fracturing in combination with directional drilling<sup>4</sup>, typically in previously un-mined areas, as easily accessible conventional methane reserves around the world become depleted (Wood *et al.* 2011).

Extraction of CSG is most developed in Queensland. Proponents envisage about 40,000 wells being drilled in the state in the coming decades. Pipelines up to 500 kilometers long (Bahnisch 2012; Gas Today 2011) are also under construction to transport this gas from dispersed production sites throughout the Surat and Bowen Basins to industrial facilities at Curtis Island near Gladstone where the coal seam gas will be converted into liquefied natural gas (LNG) for export (see Figures 1 and 2). Huge speculative investment – where what a well will produce is less important than what you can convince people it will produce – and an entanglement with global production networks sets the current CSG boom apart from smaller scale natural gas extraction in Australia in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

### *Neoliberalizing political economy, neoliberalizing discourse, and coal seam gas*

The debate about CSG in Queensland occurs in the context of a particular neoliberalizing political economy that shares features, and is increasingly interconnected, with similar others around the world (Willow and Wylie 2014). Significant structural forces, and the beliefs and language(s) with which they are interconnected, are facilitating increasingly internationalized production (Harvey 2011). This includes

<sup>3</sup> Interviews are listed in footnotes.

<sup>4</sup> High pressure fracturing has been employed in Australian coal seam gas wells since the 1990s (GISERA 2011), but the frequency required to produce export volumes, and the subsequent long distance transport to port, and the refrigeration and liquefaction of CSG into liquid natural gas (LNG) that characterizes the current CSG expansions is relatively new (APLNG n.d.(a)).

increasing foreign direct investment, especially in resource extraction projects (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010), and increasing net global energy consumption (U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) 2011). Such factors in turn impact the "field of contention" (Crossley 2006) where resource use struggles and debates play out, both directly and indirectly, particularly by promoting and rearticulating certain ways of thinking while marginalizing others (Couldry 2011:128).



Figure 2: A coal seam gas field in the Surat Basin just south of Chinchilla, Queensland. Source: AAP Newswire in Andersen 2011.

This article uses the phrase *neoliberalizing political economy* to emphasize neoliberalization as a *process* or project, involving near global pressures that shape smaller scales in complex and locally variable ways (Peck and Tickell 2002: 395-396; Harvey 2011; Springer, 2012). Political economy includes the material realities associated with this project more than would the term neoliberalism or neoliberalization alone (Fine 2004:213; Harvey 2011:119-139). In this sense, neoliberalizing political economies comprise "patterns of... power" (Gill 1995:4) and structures of governance that are dominated by the "power and influence of the agents of transnational capital", and ever re/configured to reward those who work within the logic of 'the market' (Gill 1995:10).

Key in the perpetuation of this neoliberalization are the particular "regimes of truth" (Baviskar 2003:5051), or the particular "pervasive metalogic[s]" (Peck and Tickell 2002:383), that are drawn on to make and justify particular policies. These metalogics in turn are maintained and embodied, in local variations across the world, through discourses as well as through actions or practices (Peck and Tickell 2002:389-390; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). Discourses in this sense are particular, although varied, bundles of beliefs, concerns, and language choices that are shared across groups of people and that shape individuals' production(s) of meaning and their interactions with their world (Wodak 2001:66; c.f. Graham and Luke 2011:105). Thus this article examines apparent underlying discursive factors (beliefs and patterns of language use) to better understand the dynamics of the struggle occurring over unconventional gas in southern Queensland.

#### *Critical discourse analysis and re/productive power*

The critical discourse analysis below is embedded in a cultural political economy approach. It combines sociologist Andrew Sayer's (2001) cultural economy, and its emphasis on the regulatory impact of discursive or broadly cultural factors on economic actions and structures, with "the more... top-down



approach of political economy", and its emphasis on the reverse (Springer 2012:134. See also Graham and Luke 2011:104; Peck 2010). We approach the analysis of discursive factors as an interpretive and explanatory process, attempting to describe the relationship "between text and society" (between text and social structures, actions and practices) in terms of the mutually constitutive relationship both text and society have in creating and sustaining discursive factors (Fairclough and Wodak 1997:271–280). It is an approach that is more necessary than ever for understanding the dynamics of the current reshaping of our political economic context, since neoliberalizing political economy itself is neither a top-down nor bottom-up process (Graham and Luke 2011; Ribera-Fumaz 2009; Springer 2012).

We are interested in that language and those implicit ideas that the literature describes as key to the social reproduction of the 21st century capitalist political economy, and as interconnected with the (re)production of certain perspectives on environmental issues and resource use decisions (e.g. Cerny 2008; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Couldry 2011; McCright and Dunlap 2000; Peck and Tickell 2002). Our concern with power is, in keeping with the above, focused on power as regulatory, constitutive (Gill 2008: xiv) and/or productive (Sheridan 2005:218), rather than as something concerned with oppression or abuse (c.f. van Dijk 2001).

We thus approach critical discourse analysis, following Foucault's understanding of discourse, as the "interpret[ation of] statements as things said that privilege particular ways of seeing" (Graham 2005:10. See also Kuhn 2000). In many ways, discourse reflects the selection, emphasis and presentation of certain ideas and beliefs about what is seen to matter most in certain situations and circumstances. We interpret statements in texts and practices in the field with respect to their (re)production of a particular perspective as well their reproduction of language for presenting this perspective and for talking about the world. We pay attention not just to "what is actively done in language" but also what perspectives are excluded or more actively silenced by being "foreclosed from speakability" by the language in use (Butler 2008:190; see also Brohman 1995:305-306; Finewood and Stroup 2012).

#### *Apolitical (orthodox) economics*

'Orthodox economics' is used here as a term to describe the particular formalist approach to understanding economic questions that tends to dominate Australian state and federal government policy making (Dow and Guille 2011), as well as popular Australian national newspapers characterized as "centre-right" (Crook 2011; Dow and Guille 2011:44; Mitchell 2006). This "mainstream economics" (Fine 2004:213-4) also underpins the neoclassical and to a lesser extent (post-)Keynesian approaches that tend to dominate university economics departments (Dow and Guille 2011; Fine 2004:218) and business schools in Australia, North America and Western Europe (Thrift 1998; Wolff and Resnick 2012:24-25, 364). It is an economics primarily concerned with facilitating 'good' market functioning and maximizing economic growth. The belief that this orthodox economics is an apolitical "all-encompassing" approach to important decisions is normalized in neoliberalizing political economies. This means decisions made on the basis of "technocratic expert [economist] opinion with the aim of caring for "the market"" are considered apolitical (Mitchell 2010:21). It means the dominance of decision making by market logic is perceived to be justified "on the grounds of efficiency and even "fairness"" (Peck and Tickell 2002:394). Such neoliberalizing decision making approaches may also seek to minimize environmental impacts or improve 'quality of life', but these concerns are secondary (Harvey 1989; Mitchell 2010: 22-23; Ortnier 2011). In the context of this normalization, approaches to decision making that center on concerns other than those central in orthodox economics are considered ill-advised, or at least sectional and fringe (Freudenberg 2000; Luke 1997).

#### *Delegitimization of other perspectives*

When the orthodox economic perspective in a resource use struggle is aligned with the perspective of industry, the above described encouragement for decision makers to think and talk mostly in economic terms in turn supports a conflation of industry interests with 'the public interest' (Monbiot 2007). It also supports what the literature on neoliberalizing political economies describes as the "de-legitimization" (Davidson and Grant 2012:72), "negation" (Hage 2003:52) or "willful disregard" (Luke 1997:12) of *environmental issues*.

The normalization of the idea that orthodox economics is *the* way to make important decisions supports the "construction of non-problematicity" in resource use struggles involving dispute over whether a particular development should go ahead (Davidson and Grant 2012:72). Under this normalization, if the orthodox economic perspective supports the development in question, it can become difficult to conceive of the proposed industry development as problematic in and of itself, on the basis of non-economic factors, (McCright and Dunlap 2010:107). It becomes much more "reasonable" to locate the problem in how to manage the fact that some people (place inappropriate weight on non-economic factors and so) believe there is a problem (Davidson and Grant 2012:73; see also Freudenburg 2000, 2005:105).

#### *Normalization and language*

The normalization of the primacy of orthodox economic perspectives in decision making is supported by the language of objectivity and finality with which many statements about economics are presented within neoliberalizing discourse. The values underpinning the orthodox economics in question, and the choice to center debate on these economics, are not acknowledged. This language and this normalization together contribute to the "world-making" power of particular beliefs in neoliberalizing political economies, because they constrain debate within limited horizons (Tsing 2000:119). This "foreclosure" of some beliefs from think-ability is important because it limits both the options for action that people can conceive, and also peoples' ability to properly apprehend other perspectives (Tsing 2000). At the very least, it conceals speakers' normative bias(es), and silences perspectives that would prioritize non-economic concerns in decision making (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000:333, 335).

The extent to which orthodox economic rhetoric is normalized across the CSG debate (such that "market logics...[are normalized] as the dominant metrics of policy evaluation") thus has potential to greatly affect the CSG debate's direction, and the resulting impacts on livelihoods and landscapes in large parts of Queensland (Peck and Tickell 2002:394).

#### *Growth-first regional development*

Neoliberalizing political economies also involve enormous growth in foreign direct investment and the increasing internationalization of production (Gill 1995:10). Foreign direct investment is both increasingly streamlined, "through increased mobility of capital and faster transnational communications" across neoliberalizing political economies, and at the same time "more 'necessary' to spread risks and minimize costs in a liberalized trade environment" (Couldry 2011:55; see also Harvey 2011).

In this context, states, driven by a desire to finance government operations "in a period of much slower growth in the global... economy," are also driven by mercantilist ideologies of competition (Gill 1994:51). This competition is reinforced by, and firmly entangled in, the historical development of contemporary neoliberalizing political economies. It arises in large part from competitive relations established through the structural changes involved in the aggressive and destructive "roll-back" neoliberalism in the 1980s (Peck and Tickell 2002:386). This has been combined with the erosion of conceptual resistance to this competitive model brought about through the subsequent "roll-out," "normalized" or "proactive" neoliberalism in the 1990s (Peck and Tickell 2002:384).

With the contemporary expansion of transnational corporations (Hage 2003:19), and the centralization of their control (Vitali, Glattfelder and Battiston 2011), the above changes around foreign direct investment mean many states within neoliberalizing political economies accept global finance (i.e., the finance of large corporations) as a key regulatory force (Gill 1994:51). Across neoliberalizing political economies, policy decisions are being impacted by this push in which states (Gill 1994) and regions (Peck and Tickell 2002:383) compete for investment capital and finance (Harvey 2011). Policies are judged on whether they will bring foreign capital flowing through the state or local area, and investments that could in turn attract further investment are particularly sought after (Peck and Tickell 2002). This is the "disciplinary power" of a market that is afforded a particular kind of sovereignty by those actors facilitating the processes of neoliberalizing political economies (Peck and Tickell 2002:393).

Furthermore, in neoliberalizing political economies, government is increasingly represented as an institution whose role is to manage "the aesthetics of investment space" (Hage 2003:19), and/or "to build national space... in such a way as to produce surplus values" for citizens (Povinelli 2000:505). In this perspective on the role of government, competition for investment becomes "not... a beneficial hidden hand, but... an external coercive law" forcing the de-prioritization of factors other than those key in "growth-first" visions of regional development (Harvey 1989:12). As Peck and Tickell note, this re/orientation of visions of development in regional areas towards economic growth, investment and infrastructure can be described as "growth-first" regional development (2002:394).

In this approach also, active participation in the "internationalization of production" is "taken for granted" as a "desirable necessary... condition for economic growth" (Cerny 2008:20), and the kind of economic growth it involves (investment, infrastructure, jobs) is conceptualized as a necessary precursor to prosperity. From this perspective, we have to ensure sustained investments and industry expansion before we can consider health and wellbeing. The normalization of this perspective prioritizes development initiatives that are "large scale externally resourced and directed", emphasizing "vast and untapped opportunity" over "endogenous community-based development" that is small-scale and internally oriented. It also promotes a vision of development that assumes the benefits will be shared throughout (often diverse) communities, and overlooks the possibility of dividing or factionalizing communities. Key in this process, for Larson, is that the communities then experiencing division are also "struggling under worsening biophysical conditions" (2010:11), since in striving to make the most of 'opportunity' they likely have not managed to ensure that they are adequately compensated for the social and natural capital that has been exported.

In this context, then, it becomes important to investigate the extent to which these beliefs are at play in the coal seam gas debate. Such analysis highlights how particular representations about what will bring cash flow *through* a community, and what that cash flow will in turn bring (e.g. prosperity), remains key to the industry justifications given for why certain communities in Australia should develop in certain ways (Povinelli 2000:507).

### 3. Analyzing CSG debates: regional development and economics in decision making

In investigating perspectives and language concerning the above two themes in the CSG debate, we sought out documents where the constituent groups in question explicitly set out to summarize their perspective, often on the group's own website. We also considered documents produced by these groups referring readers to more information. In total we critically examined 32 texts. These include media statements and reports, promotional materials, parliamentary debates, and discussions/information provided on various websites. This analysis is supplemented with interviews that further illustrate the ways in which particular values and beliefs are at play in the coal seam gas debate.

#### *The CSG Industry*

The texts examined from CSG companies and their industry representative APPEA (The Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association) all reproduce the neoliberalizing belief that economics is more or less "all that there is" (Peck 2010:xi) when it comes to decision making about CSG expansion. Broadly speaking, the related neoliberalizing idea that economics is less political than other ways of knowing is implicit in these texts. In one text (considered first below) this idea is explicit.

The media release published on APPEA's 'We want CSG' website (APPEA 2012c), in particular, reflects and mobilizes the belief that economics can and should be apolitical. The other two APPEA texts examined (APPEA 2012a; APPEA 2012b) address benefits for communities in entirely orthodox economic terms (attracting investment and strengthening economies), and in this way similarly support belief in the importance of orthodox economics in resource use decision making, albeit it less emphatically.

In their 'We want CSG' media release, APPEA argues political questions concerning CSG expansion are incompatible with decision-making that supports good economic outcomes. The article (APPEA 2012c) warns that:



...political expedience [i.e. failing, for political reasons, to make the policy changes that APPEA wants] may threaten both Australia's attractiveness as a place to do business and the hundreds of billions of dollars' [sic] in oil and gas industry investment still to be approved.

The above comment draws on the idea that making decisions aimed at fostering (foreign) investment in industry (i.e. making decisions for orthodox economic reasons) is, at least to some extent, clearly separable from making decisions for political reasons. In particular, this comment positions engaging with political questions as something that *threatens* good economic outcomes. In so doing, this media statement from APPEA reflects the normalization within neoliberalizing political economies of the belief that economics-based decision making is politically neutral. It also *privileges* decision making that draws on the language of this economics over decision making that acknowledges its engagement with political questions.

Public statements by CSG companies themselves tend not to be this clear or combative. The texts examined mostly described the good economic outcomes that were possible. The closest they came to acknowledging debate was in describing risk management measures or their proactive creation of processes through which people may raise social impact concerns (APLNG n.d.(b); Santos GLNG 2012a).<sup>5</sup>

However, it is significant that almost all the CSG company web sites and other promotional materials examined (including the two APPEA texts (APPEA 2012a, 2012b) center on statistics about economic benefits as well as technical aspects of the projects (APNLG n.d.(a), n.d.(c); Santos GLNG 2012a, 2012c; QCLNG 2012b, 2012c). This means all three major CSG project proponents considered here draw on, and we suggest also benefit from, the neoliberalizing assumption that economics just *is* what we "think *with*" (Peck 2010). The focus of these texts reflects and reproduces the idea that these projects are more or less entirely about the economics. In so doing, they marginalize perspectives that focus on other dimensions of the projects.

Similarly, when the proponents for the three approved CSG-LNG projects on Curtis Island address regional development and benefits to communities from CSG expansion, they consistently emphasize factors that match well with the neoliberalizing vision of growth-first regional development. These texts emphasize boosting, strengthening, and/or diversifying regional economies (where key words are *jobs* and *opportunity*), infrastructure, and investment. For example, the APLNG (Australia Pacific LNG) *About the project* webpage emphasizes (APLNG n.d.(a), emphasis added):

It'll be a source of major *investment* through to 2020, creating around 6,000 *jobs* throughout the life of the Project [sic], increasing local skills and *boosting regional economies*.

Similarly, the *Key benefits* page of the QCLNG (Queensland Curtis LNG) website centres on the statement that (2012a, emphasis added):

The QCLNG Project is helping to diversify the Queensland economy, generate new *jobs* and *rejuvenate regional towns* and communities.

The opening voiceover in GLNG's (Gladstone Liquid Natural Gas) video *An active member of the community* says (Santos GLNG 2012b, emphasis added):

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<sup>5</sup> In these responses to debate, CSG companies generally do not venture near the question of community or more localized forms of natural resource control. They talk about consulting with communities, but these interactions are primarily about social impact amelioration measures, assuming projects go ahead as planned (e.g. Cavaye 2011). The question of localized forms of natural resource control is silenced.

Opportunity, upgraded *infrastructure*, an invigorated *economy*, and a renewed community optimism. These are some of the benefits accruing through the region around Roma, as Santos' coal seam gas business gains momentum.

The language used is strikingly similar across all the projects, matching well with the APPEA website. The central idea on the APPEA *Regional Development* webpage seems to be that (2012b; emphasis added):

CSG can play an important role in regional development. The industry is bringing *infrastructure* and *investment* to several rural and regional districts, providing *new jobs* and strengthening and diversifying *regional economies*.

APPEA indicates that the industry will make other contributions to regional Southern Queensland, but talks about these too only in terms of a dollar value (2012b):

In addition to jobs, infrastructure development and other investment, CSG companies also fund various other initiatives in the communities in which they operate. In 2011, CSG companies committed almost \$53 million in contributions to Queensland communities.

The above factors, typical of the concerns of perspectives in which "growth-first" regional development is normalized, are linked in these CSG company texts to *prosperity* and *quality of life* in rural and regional Southern Queensland. This is achieved through language about 'rejuvenating' towns and reversing population decline and population aging. Promotional videos (APLNG 2011; Santos GLNG 2012a, 2012b) made this connection particularly strongly, explicitly associating (economic) growth as a result of CSG expansion with the idea of "the children coming back" in a depopulating rural countryside (APLNG 2011).

For example, the audio in APLNG's video *Reviving local communities* begins with a direct statement asserting the neoliberalizing understanding of regional development described above: "Regional development is about opportunity. It's about business, employment and the opportunities for our communities to grow." It then shows a slow pan through fairly empty streets, and a lone ute (an Australian pick-up truck) on a dirt road at night, interspersed with shots of a man who we know from APLNG's other videos is a local government councillor in the Western Downs, a local government area at the heart of expansion in CSG extraction in southern Queensland. The councillor says, "prior to CSG, our communities were [pause] were [sic] dying. Certainly going backwards numbers wise." Then later, as the background music picks up, and the camera cuts to shots of a football game and well-peopled streets, the same councillor's voice says (APLNG 2011):

The opportunity for them [our children] to come back now is just [pause] far greater. The jobs will be here, and I think that our communities will grow. We will have, you know, the children coming back. We will have other people suddenly realizing the great things about our community and wanting to live here.

This issue, concerning the future of rural communities that are ageing (Foskey 2005; Haberkorn 2002) and shrinking (Holmes, Charles-Edwards and Bell 2005:17, 24-25), is a real and emotive concern for rural Queenslanders (e.g. Arthur 2010; Love 2012).

#### *The Queensland Government*

The texts produced by the Queensland Government and its Ministers also mobilize the neoliberalizing idea of a neutral (orthodox) economic wisdom that should be the basis of decision making about natural resources. This is mostly expressed through language about how imperative it is to make decisions about

mining that facilitate "*growth ... and prosperity*" in the state economy (Menkens in Queensland Parliament 2012:1624; emphasis added; see also LNP 2012; State of Queensland 2012d), even while taking into account other factors. As with the CSG company texts, the Queensland Government texts also suggest that perspectives that do not center on (orthodox) economics are "[un]reasonable" and biased (State of Queensland 2012d).

Throughout the Legislative Assembly discussion of proposed legislative changes impacting CSG expansion, comments by members of the LNP (the conservative party currently in government) foregrounded the idea that these changes were being made to "pave the way for a stronger market and better growth within Queensland" (Pucci in Queensland Parliament 2012:1625). A key idea was that:

As CSG continues to evolve as an emerging resource [i.e. as production accelerates and demand increases], the need to refine the current legislation in order to facilitate that growth should be a priority (Pucci in Queensland Parliament 2012:1625).

The Assistant Minister to the Department of State Development, Infrastructure and Planning (the Assistant Minister for Finance, Administration and Regulatory Reform, Deb Frecklington), said in the same discussion (Queensland Parliament 2012:1626):

The mining industry is one of the four pillars identified by our LNP Newman led government to drive economic growth and prosperity in our state. Therefore, it is vitally important that this legislation [i.e. our decisions concerning CSG] reflects this agenda and assists rather than hinders the resources sector.

Often the emphasis in these texts is on being "efficient" or "practical" in the facilitation of growth (State of Queensland 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). It is important to note that this language may also reflect contemporary intra- and inter-party politics in Queensland as well as beliefs concerning regional development and prosperity. However, this emphasis on *how* economic growth is facilitated suggests the facilitation of growth itself is being taken for granted as the goal of government decisions in these texts (e.g. Cripps in Queensland Parliament 2012:1612; State of Queensland 2012d). The government texts examined thus reflect the normalization, within neoliberalizing political economies, of the idea that orthodox economics is the natural basis for decision making concerning resource use. It reflects an effect of this normalization: that efficiency, or even "fairness", alone becomes sufficient justification for the dominance of decision making by market logic (Peck and Tickell 2002:394).

Where discussion of "reasonable" decisions centered on language about compromise in the examined government texts (Seeney in Weekly Times Now 2012; State of Queensland 2012d), two aspects about the use of this language that concern economics and decision making were observed. Firstly, that the benefits of the compromises valorized in these texts, even when they centred on the "safeguard[ing of] the environment", were brought back to the resultant benefit to "rural [non-CSG] industries" and therefore, it is implied, to the economy (Weekly Times Now 2012). Thus, the compromises are being celebrated because of their *economic* inputs (to the society).

Secondly, compromise meant compromise on variables other than the go-ahead of all proposed CSG expansions themselves. This suggests that reasonable compromises make concessions in domains other than economic growth, but that compromising economic growth is unreasonable. For example, in describing people who are completely opposed to the proposed CSG developments, the Queensland Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development Jeff Seeney described them as "political opportunists" with "extreme" views. "They're not interested in an industry that can provide an economic input", he said (Weekly Times Now 2012). The implication is not only that the decision to proceed with CSG in the name of economic growth is relatively apolitical, but also that complete opposition to the proposed CSG expansion is extreme because it does not put sufficient weight on "economic input[s]."

Similarly, in responding to criticism that Queensland's new GasFields Commission is biased because it includes the Chief Executive Officer of APPEA as a Commissioner, who is clearly pro-CSG-expansion, but does not include a Commissioner who is clearly anti-CSG, the Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning said (State of Queensland 2012d):

There is no room for extreme, narrow, lop-sided agendas on the Gasfields Commission or other decision-making bodies across Queensland... What's needed are fair minded people who are prepared to work with others to reach reasonable decisions that advance the wellbeing and prosperity of Queenslanders.

In this media statement, the minister positioned people as either "responsible, real representatives" that heed "science, facts, commonsense or compromise", or single minded and unreasonable. Similarly here, being unreasonable was equated with not having a clear commitment to maximizing orthodox economic outcomes.

#### *Active voices from within the CSG debate*

The Minister's commitment to orthodox economic outcomes, and accusations of alternative views as unreasonable, may also be shared with community representatives advocating the expansion of the CSG industry in their region. Among industry supporters in the township of Tara, for example, there is a "vision for the future ... that the town needs to get bigger" by promoting it "as a beautiful place to live in... to attract potential CSG employees and associated businesses."<sup>6</sup> Opponents of such visions were the subject of an unsigned poster which was publicly displayed in the town, and which attempted to silence them through descriptions of their actions as undermining economic growth and prosperity. It read (c.f. de Rijke 2013:9):

This is the group of people who are devaluing our homes, our town and our blocks of land. Make no mistake[,] it is these people who are destroying the value of our town, not the gas and oil companies. This is the group of mainly unemployed drones who whilst having their snouts in the public trough are abusing and threatening honest workers who try to come into our town to spend their wages. ... These people who do not represent us fraudulently continue to scream "hands off Tara"... Tara doesn't need this.<sup>7</sup>

The coal seam gas debate is also characterized by other, but related, forms of pressure to silence views potentially deviating from those which emphasize the benefits of economic growth and investment. Fieldwork with public servants, for example, found at least some had been told, either implicitly or explicitly, that "we can't talk about CSG; only those at the highest level".<sup>8</sup>

Related to such political pressure, a number of people employed in representative organizations theoretically acting as conduits between government and local communities (such as certain environmental, business and tourism organizations that are financially dependent on government funding) have found it particularly difficult to take an organizational position that does not fully endorse the government's focus on industrial economic development, despite widespread community concerns. This difficulty, according to fieldwork participants, has arisen particularly as a result of funding arrangements and the vulnerability of such organizations to potential budget cuts.<sup>9</sup>

Lastly, coal seam gas developments have also caused significant debate among Indigenous parties, with some vehemently opposed to them, and others such as the New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC) aiming to become actively involved in coal seam gas and oil extraction. The arguments for this

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<sup>6</sup> Meeting, Queensland, March 25, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Copy of poster obtained via e-mail on July 30, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with public servant, New South Wales, January 15, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Interviews with representatives, New South Wales, January 21 and January 23, 2013.

involvement include the potential for NSWALC "to finally ensure Aboriginal people benefit from the wealth generated through mining" (NSWALC 2012: 6). This benefit is regarded as essential because "...ending the cycle of intergenerational poverty is very expensive" (NSWALC 2012: 6). NSWALC encourages its members "to be smart enough to think outside the box" since "we've protested before, we've screamed and we shouted, but if we choose to wait for government to invest in our communities and in our children, we'll be waiting another 200 years" (NSWALC 2013). Aboriginal involvement in the oil and gas industry is thus seen as an opportunity for future generations which may assist in the enhancement of "economic independence" and "true self-determination" (NSWALC 2012: 2,6).

One of the Local Aboriginal Land Councils in the northeastern part of New South Wales supports this aim. Its Chief Executive Officer explained his support was based on increased competition for "the Black dollar", both among Aboriginal organizations and between Aboriginal organizations and non-Indigenous service providers:

The problem is the dollars are starting to dry up. CSG [will bring] employment and long-term joint ventures... People with money can lock [land] up... Mother Earth kind of stuff; Greenies love it.<sup>10</sup>

Such perspectives point to severe Indigenous disadvantage resulting from generations of dispossession and marginalization, and a sense that if mining expansion in Australia is inevitable, Aboriginal people might as well try to maximize the benefits to them (Scott 2013). Related arguments currently feature prominently in broader Australian societal debates about the potential role of extractive industries in "integrating" Indigenous people into the "real" economy, and improving Indigenous livelihoods (see Langton (2013a) and Frankel (2013)). Among the most vocal Indigenous proponents of Indigenous involvement in or support for mining, opposition to extraction projects is equated with opposition to Aboriginal advancement, or worse, only "superficial" interest in Aboriginal welfare "typical of the 'leftists' who prefer their relationships with indigenous people to be of the 'Aboriginal handbag' variety" (Langton 2013b).

The neoliberalizing normalization of orthodox economic thinking is thus clearly reflected in the rural setting of CSG 'roll out' and in Queensland Government texts about CSG, as it is in the CSG company texts. Public reactions to some proactive Indigenous support for CSG extraction also raises other questions about why such support is more disagreeable for some commentators than is non-aboriginal people's involvement in CSG. Also evident in these texts are the conflation of industry and public interests, and the resulting neoliberalizing de-legitimization of other interests. The above analysis reveals the normalization of orthodox economics 'in action', playing out and reproducing neoliberalizing ideas through the CSG debate, shaping the debate in the process: "reasonable decisions" concerning CSG are generally construed as those that clearly reflect orthodox economic priorities (State of Queensland 2012d; see also Frecklington in Queensland Parliament 2012:1626).

At a broader regional level, the Queensland Government does not express views about CSG expansion exclusively in terms of benefits as do CSG companies. Understanding the beliefs about regional development underlying Queensland Government texts, however, is the assumption that most readers will understand that the economic growth, infrastructure and investment CSG expansion will bring are the necessary conditions for increasing prosperity and/or quality of life in regional southern Queensland. Sometimes this is reflected in the bundling together of "economic growth, job creation and prosperity in Queensland" (Cripps 2012:1432; State of Queensland 2012e; Menkens in Queensland Parliament 2012:1624) or just "economic growth and prosperity" (Frecklington in Queensland Parliament 2012: 1626. See also Costigan in Queensland Parliament 2012: 1628). At other times this position is more implicitly asserted. For example, a government document designed for households about the impacts of the proposed CSG expansions states: "No matter what business you're in, investment growth is *breathing new life into cities and towns*" (Queensland Government n.d.:6; emphasis added).

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<sup>10</sup> Interview, Local Aboriginal Land Council CEO, New South Wales, January 17, 2013.

This document also makes some limited reference to the idea of "the children coming back" (APLNG 2011), which is emphasized by CSG companies, connecting this explicitly to investment and jobs. It states (Queensland Government n.d.:3):

The CSG to LNG industry has already committed to \$45 billion in private sector investment to Queensland and can deliver up to 18 000 jobs over the next four years alone – these are jobs not only for our kids, but also for our grandkids.

The above "ways of seeing" privileged in Queensland Government texts about CSG expansion reflect the normalization of particular beliefs about both economics and decision making and regional development in neoliberalizing political economies (Graham 2005:10). In particular, the analysis suggests that this normalization is reflected fairly similarly across CSG companies and the Queensland Government.

*Lock the Gate: resistance to the normalization of economics as the basis of decision making*

The social movement 'Lock the Gate' advances impacts on health, water, food, soil and land (these last three were often merged (e.g. Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. 2011a, n.d.(b)) as the key factors upon which decisions about CSG expansion should center. "Air" (meaning mostly climate) is sometimes listed as a key point also but, unlike the others, it is usually not then reinforced throughout the body of the texts, and it is absent from more recent texts (Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. 2012b, n.d.(b). c.f. Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. 2012a, n.d.(a)<sup>11</sup>). In any case, these factors are not immediately economic in nature. Thus through emphasizing them, Lock the Gate mobilizes beliefs that fall outside the sphere of concern of orthodox economics.

The concern with health, water, and food and/or soil is woven throughout the *What is 'unconventional gas'?* flyer (Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. 2012c), and recurs throughout the Lock the Gate website (Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. 2012a). The following list of concerns from the Lock the Gate *Generic Minister Letter* is representative of how they are discussed (accommodating for the inclusion of air) (Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. 2011a):

They [i.e. the proposed CSG developments] involve damage to aquifers, and the contamination and depletion of water supplies; They will permanently destroy the productive capacity of food-producing land; They threaten the health and well being of people living in nearby communities; and [t]hey are inconsistent with steps taken to reduce carbon pollution.

The language around these concerns in the texts examined is about unknown risks ("inadequately assessed and inadequately-regulated... industries" (Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. 2012d), and the threat or permanent damage to "irreplaceable" values (Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. 2012c).

A critique of economics is identifiable in Lock the Gate discourse, but this does not necessarily comprise a rejection of an all-encompassing economics. For example, one of the analyzed texts (the flyer) contained two sentences about the impact of CSG expansion on real estate prices. This indicates that there is some reproduction of the idea that economics is a relevant factor, or at least that Lock the Gate in this flyer is drawing on economics to engage a range of readers. However, it also suggests that economic perspectives are marginal in Lock the Gate commentary generally. Although the accounting below cannot be taken to be a conclusive indication of the relative weight of each concern, it does help give a picture: The flyer comprised forty sentences in total. Twenty of them concerned health, water, soil and/or food (an average of seven each),

<sup>11</sup> The Background section of the Lock the Gate website, which was taken down to give way to a new site on October 23, 2012, summarized these concerns as "our health, our water, our air and our land" (Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. 2011b). This was replaced with a list of 5 concerns that combines the above key health, water, and food/soil with protecting "Australia's bushlands, wetlands and wildlife", and "Australia's Aboriginal and cultural heritage" (Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. 2012b).



three concerned climate impacts / air, and the rest either provided technical information (ten sentences, for example disambiguating CSG from other unconventional gas), or other safety related concerns not repeated much elsewhere (fire risks / traffic hazards, five sentences) (Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. 2012c).

Otherwise, when economics is mentioned it is in the context of the idea that the economic arguments presented in support of CSG expansion are ill-informed. The idea seems to be that these arguments do not look at the full economic picture, either in terms of breadth, where Lock the Gate talks about impacts on other industries, or temporal depth. For example, the former *About* section of the Lock the Gate Facebook page states (Lock the Gate Alliance Inc n.d.(a). See also Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. 2012d; emphasis added; bracket in original):

We believe that neither we, nor our governments (at all levels), are sufficiently well informed about these industries, *about their true role in our economy* and their impact on our health and welfare as a nation and within the diverse communities that constitute our nation.

Concerns about the breadth of existing economic models are expressed only loosely. Enough information is provided for readers to make links to debates happening elsewhere about "Dutch Disease" (the impact of a booming export industry on currency exchange rates and reduced competitiveness of other industries, see The Australia Institute 2011; c.f. Duffy 2012), but the connection is not made explicit. Concern about the temporal depth of dominant economic models is expressed through language about "short term" and "long term", and "the welfare of future generations of Australians and our future ability to thrive" (Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. 2012a).

Together these findings suggest that: Lock the Gate is broadly silent on whether economics is apolitical, although it very occasionally draws on orthodox economic descriptions / justifications. Mostly Lock the Gate seems to resist discursive pressures concerning economics and decision making within neoliberalizing political economies by calling for decisions to be made on non-economic grounds.

### *Alternatives?*

The texts from Lock the Gate suggest a different vision of prosperity and quality of life to the vision normalized in neoliberalizing political economies. For example, their language about health, water, and land in the context of beliefs concerning development, connects prosperity to these assets, rather than to "opportunity" or "jobs" arising from infrastructure development and investment growth. Similarly, the language around risk and irreplaceability also constitutes an implicit critique of neoliberalizing beliefs about regional development, albeit a limited one.

However, beyond this, in emphasizing loss, damage and interference, the texts from Lock the Gate seem to overlook further discussion of regional development. A key illustration of this is how the question of renewable energy sources is addressed across Lock the Gate texts. With the exception of discussion by members on the wall of the Lock the Gate Facebook community group, discussion of renewable energy is positive in the texts examined. But it is limited to passing - sometimes only implicit - references, and single statements. One text, for example, states that CSG is compromising "our future ability to thrive in a new world driven by renewable energy sources" (Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. n.d.(a)). Another text states that "cleaner, safer technologies available right now" will not have the destructive impacts of CSG (Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. 2012c).

The Lock the Gate community page on Facebook actually specifies that people are not to post messages about renewable energy strategies, because it is outside the issues with which Lock the Gate is concerned: "Topics like Chemtrails, renewable energy strategies, carbon tax and other things not related to the Lock The Gate Alliance campaign will be removed" (Lock the Gate Alliance Inc. n.d.(a)).

The following post on the community page illustrates further what this might mean to members (Core 2012):

We are not after a solution to the energy problem, we are trying to stop the dirty attack on innocent people, we want clean water and air for our homes, we want to stop mining....

Furthermore, a quick statistical investigation of the Lock the Gate community Facebook page confirmed that renewable energy is rarely discussed. Searching back over two days and about nineteen hours, we found at least 191 comments or posts had been made in that time frame. "Gas" was mentioned 65 times, "CSG" 55 times, but "renewable" or "renewables" was mentioned only six times. Of these, four were the kind of simple trivial contrast described above, one was a comment in an old thread debating whether renewables are possible, and one was in a thread debating the posting rules. Performing the same process a week later, this time over the preceding three days and just over twenty hours, there were at least 265 posts or comments in total. Of these, 79 included "gas", and only two included "renewable/s". Of these two, one was a simple comparison, and one was a repost of the above mentioned posting rules.

The post below by a high profile member of Lock the Gate points to ways in which visioning alternatives may in fact seem tactically unhelpful to people working with Lock the Gate to oppose CSG expansion (Pratzky 2012:online; emphasis added):

If a reporter asked you the following what would be your answer? "There is no proof that hydro fracking leads to water contamination many studies have found it's safe so why stop when there are many jobs at risk." I want your fact based answers not the old because it's bad and we need to use renewable energy.

However, reading across debate threads on the community page, it may in fact be currently too difficult for Lock the Gate's members to achieve a shared, alternative "holistic" vision for regional development (Christo 2012). The following comment by an administrator of the page helps illustrate. It was posted in support of a post about the diversity of views within Lock the Gate, and in response to comments that Lock the Gate could not achieve real or meaningful change without engaging with alternatives: "What we are doing is building a social movement. That is how meaningful change is achieved...." (Moles 2012).

In the context of the thread, this post suggests that this is the reason Lock the Gate is not talking about alternative energy, or other alternative development paths for regional communities in southern Queensland.

In terms of organized face-to-face meetings, during a recent symposium on environmental justice at the University of Sydney, a seasoned Friends of the Earth environmental activist further explained a related silence in the context of the unusual political alliance between what he referred to as progressive 'urban greenies', and those living in the politically conservative rural regions. He stressed that, in order to maintain the alliance of socio-politically diverse members, "a conscious decision was made [among 'urban greenies'] not to talk about alternatives, renewables, or even climate change". In the same vein, during the disputes about coal seam gas exploration in the northeastern region of New South Wales in early 2013, the leading members of an urban environment center near the location of contested drilling activities "took a back seat" because, in their opinion, politically conservative "people impacted [by the drilling] would not talk to Greenies ... We didn't want to put people off. Farmers wouldn't have anything to do with it [if we were involved]." <sup>12</sup> Similar politics of silence have also been reported among the members of a recent protest alliance in opposition to a large dam proposal in Queensland (e.g. de Rijke 2012).

These common threads – web and non web-based – and the silencing or marginalization of discussion of non-growth-first regional development across the Lock the Gate texts analyzed above, suggests that members of Lock the Gate may be, in this internal debate, experiencing some of the same cultural or

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<sup>12</sup> Interview, Environment Centre, New South Wales, January 14, 2013.

discursive normalizing pressures typical of neoliberalizing political economies that work to foreclose some beliefs from even being think-able. The limited support available, in the neoliberalizing political economic context of their campaign, for seriously envisaging alternative approaches to regional development means it is difficult for Lock the Gate to address regional development meaningfully and maintain its characteristically broad alliance. It suggests that, despite neoliberalizing normalizing pressure not to talk explicitly in these terms, one of the things that "is [actually] at stake" (Baviskar 2003:5051) in the CSG debate is this vision of regional development.

#### 4. Conclusion

Neoliberal political economy normalizes a particular set of economic ideas concerned with market functioning and economic growth as *the* all-encompassing, apolitical basis for making decisions about natural resources. Furthermore, a particular vision of regional development in which foreign investment, and therefore economic growth and infrastructure, are thought of as necessary prerequisites for prosperity in regional areas is similarly normalized. This article addressed these two themes of economic ideas and regional development, exploring their role at the intersection of neoliberalizing discourse and resource struggles.

Critical comparisons across texts and interviews found for example that health, water, food, soil, land, as well as irreplaceability, damage and interference, were key terms in Lock the Gate's discussion of coal seam gas. Investigating key language around regional development in particular revealed significant overlap between CSG companies' and Queensland Government texts. The bundling of two terms (growth and prosperity) appears particularly important in (re)producing a key neoliberalizing perspective.

The analysis of texts found that a number of the Queensland Government and Lock the Gate texts reflect the "foreclosure" of non-neoliberalizing beliefs. This active silencing of alternative perspectives can constrain what is "thinkable" as well as what actions seem reasonable. For Lock the Gate this seemed to be about constraints on their ability to continue to exist as a broad coalition while also advancing a vision for regional development that is substantially different to the one that is normalized in neoliberalizing political economies. In particular this meant that climate change, and the specifics of non-mining visions for regional development, were rarely discussed explicitly.

For government, the analysis of public documents suggests this foreclosure is reflected in the way making decisions without centering them in orthodox economics is unthinkable: it is a process embedded in the neoliberalizing normalization of economics as simply what we "think *with*" (Peck 2010:xi; original emphasis).

The critical discourse analyses of publically available texts revealed that comments about CSG from both the Queensland Government and CSG companies draw substantially and consistently on perspectives normalized in neoliberalizing political economies. The analysis has thus revealed considerable discursive consistency across those branches of the Queensland Government making public statements about CSG, and CSG companies themselves (again, as represented in public statements). This consistency was found despite the internal diversity of both the Queensland Government and CSG companies, each with departments not necessarily aligned in objectives, such as those tasked with, for example, environmental protection, and those tasked with facilitating or developing resource extraction technologies. These public texts themselves contribute in turn to the normalization of orthodox economics. The perspectives represented in texts produced by Lock the Gate, however, occasionally reflected neoliberalizing political economies. The core of Lock the Gate commentary is resistant to the normalization of orthodox economics as a basis for decision making and growth-first visions of regional development.

The article has suggested that there are at least some underlying beliefs, maintained and supported by the "world-making" power of normalization in neoliberalizing political economies (Tsing 2000) that the Queensland Government and CSG companies both engage with positively, but that Lock the Gate generally does not, or at least does not to the same extent. This has implications for any descriptions of the Queensland

Government as a neutral arbitrator restoring balance between the beliefs of gas companies and groups like Lock the Gate. It also offers a useful analysis from cultural political economy to enrich existing descriptions of instrumental and structural ties between Australian governments and extractive industries.

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